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ABSTRACT

A comparison of the linguistic contexts of Scotland and Taiwan focuses on three aspects: (1) existence of two linguistic codes belonging to the same language family; (2) the status of one of those languages as the standard set by a larger, more powerful neighbor from whose perspective any other variety is likely to look like a dialect; and (3) the marginalized language of an older population (Scots Gaelic and Taiwanese, respectively). The roles of the languages in the two contexts are described, and the basic similarity between the linguistic paradigms of Scotland and Taiwan are shown in the suggested alignment: English is to Mandarin; Scottish English is to Taiwan Mandarin; Scots is to Taiwanese; North-Eastern Scots is to Hakka; Gaelic is to Austro-Polynesian; Highland English is to Austro-Polynesian Mandarin. Political and historical forces influencing language use are highlighted, and comparisons are made of language patterns in riddles and poetry in the two language constellations, with attention given to translation issues. (MSE)

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A Far Eastern Parallel: The Languages of Scotland and Taiwan

By Manfred Malzahn

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It is a well-known fact that linguistic conditions in Scotland are not without parallels in other parts of the world. Comparisons may serve to illustrate the cultural and political intricacies of a situation where there is a three-way relationship between linguistic codes, with two of them belonging to the same language family, and one of those in turn representing the linguistic standard set by a larger, more powerful neighbour from whose point of view any other variety is likely to appear as a regional dialect. The third element in the triad, the marginalised language of an older population, is at least certain to be acknowledged as a language, while it also needs to assert or defend its status as an integral and productive constituent of the national culture, with a natural right to space in the media, the educational system, and other forums of language use which reflect and shape the sense of cultural identity.

Having said this, it seems to me that there can hardly be a more obvious parallel to Scotland with its English-Scots-Gaelic trichotomy than that which is found on the island of Taiwan or, to use the official political instead of a geographical term, in the Republic of China on Taiwan. This title indicates the claim that the government in Taipei is the legitimate successor of that established in Beijing after the 1911 revolution. To today's Beijing government, Taiwan is a renegade province ruled by separatists. With the exception of a few of the smaller players on the global stage, mostly countries situated in Africa or Central America, the international community has rather meekly caved in to the view held by the People's Republic. A *de facto* sovereign state with 21 million citizens, a thriving economy, and a democratically elected president and parliament, is thus without a seat in the United Nations.

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Whereas non-sovereign Scotland can at least send out a football squad under its own name, the team from Taiwan is forced to play its World Cup qualifiers under the fantasy title of 'Chinese Taipei'.

Mandarin enjoys official status as "the national language on both sides of the Taiwan Straits".[1] It is sometimes referred to as 中文 (chung-wen), after the name of the country China: 中國 (chung-kuo) literally translates as 'middle-state', and hence its speech is 'middle-language'. In Taiwan, however, it is perhaps more often called 國語 (kuo-yü), 'state-speech', and in the People's Republic, quite simply and prescriptively 'normal speech' (p'u-t'ung-hua). All variants are commonly classed as dialects, even if they are so different as to be mutually unintelligible. One of these is Taiwanese or 閩南話 (min-nan-hua), 'Southern Min speech', named after that region of the Chinese mainland from which settlers arrived during the Ming dynasty rule, about four centuries after the earliest Chinese incomers, the Hakka, who had begun to enter Taiwan around 1,000 A.D.

Before then, the island was populated by Austro-Polynesian tribes living in both the Eastern plains and the Western mountains. The plains dwellers were either displaced or assimilated, blending into the dominant new group by intermarriage. The tribes based in the more inaccessible and less fertile regions still exist today, even if they number less than 2% of Taiwan's total population. In colloquial Mandarin, they are called 高山族 (kao-shan-tsu), 'high mountain people' or Highlanders; official documents use 原住民 (yuan-chu min), a term that is commonly translated as 'aboriginals', while Taiwanese has a derogatory epithet which makes them 'savages', 番仔 (huan-na). Their languages are obviously as distinct from Mandarin or Taiwanese as Gaelic is from English or Scots. The Hakka, who were likewise driven towards the more remote

[1] Shaw Yu-ming et al. (eds), *Republic of China Yearbook, 1990-91* (Taipei, 1990) p. 35

areas of Taiwan by the new settlers from China's Fukien province, also retained their own language, a variety of Chinese known as 客家話 (ke-jia-hua), and unintelligible to speakers of both Mandarin and Taiwanese.

At this stage, I should emphasise that my own level of proficiency in any of Taiwan's languages must be rated as at best extremely low. Yet the basic similarity between the linguistic paradigms of Scotland and Taiwan appears to me to be so clear-cut that I would venture to suggest the following alignment:

English	Mandarin
Scottish English	Taiwanese Mandarin[2]
Scots	Taiwanese
North-Eastern Scots	Hakka
Gaelic	Austro-Polynesian
Highland English	Austro-Polynesian Mandarin

The number of Mandarin speakers was drastically increased by the retreat of the Koumintang forces to Taiwan in 1949. For a long period of time, Mainlanders monopolised the positions of power and behaved perhaps even more like colonialists than the Japanese, who had ruled Taiwan from 1895 to 1945. Today, Presidential addresses are translated into Taiwanese and Hakka, and children are no longer beaten for speaking either at school, but in the educational system, Mandarin still reigns supreme, and the use of other languages is limited by the absence of a written standard. "For Scots to function as a national language, it requires a fully regulated spelling system",[3] says Angus Stirling, and a similar statement could well be made for Taiwanese.

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[2] defined as "a type of Mandarin spoken with a definite and conspicuous Minnan Hua accent" in Karl-Eugen Feifel, *Language Attitudes in Taiwan. A Social Evaluation of Language in Social Change* (Taipei, 1994) p. 22

[3] "On a Standardised Spelling for Scots", *Scottish Language* 13 (1994) p. 89

Writing Taiwanese is still a major problem. Not only does it lack a standard, as Scots does, but while Scots writers can nevertheless work towards a standard by trying to find the most suitable phonetic spelling for the sounds they want to reproduce, the syllabic Chinese characters pose a major difficulty in making Taiwanese appear on the printed page in any understandable or acceptable form. Thus, one finds wholesale romanisations of Taiwanese, as in the following:[4]

Booi Buxnduee, Lie Urn Hoysex! 沒問題！你一定會好的 黃詩連

Pvixiaang: "Isefng aq, tviaf korng goar cit'qoarn pvi cviaa pvae y, si afnzvoar lie nar ue ka goar korng goar booi buxnduee."

Isefng: "Kunkuq tofngkex, lie hoan ee cit'qoarn pvi pengkwn zap-ee laixbin kandvaf cit ee uexeng-did oah-loiqiaai, ar goar ykefng liensoax y sie kao-ee aq, lie si due zap-ee laai qvoax cit'qoarn pvi ee laang, sofie goar qvoax booi buxnduee laq, lie urn hoysex!"

病人：醫生，聽說我這種病很難醫，你爲什麼跟我說沒問題。

醫生：根據統計，你得的這種病平均十個裏面只有一個能活下來，我已經連續醫死九個了，你是第十個來看這種病的人，所以我看你一定沒問題。

No problem! You will recover.

Patient: Doctor, I heard that my disease is not easy to cure. How can you tell me that I will make a full recovery?

Doctor: Statistics show that one of ten patients with this disease will survive. Nine of my patients have died from it, and you are the tenth. This makes me think that you will be cured for sure.

More common is a way of representing Taiwanese by means of Chinese characters which is best described as a bilingual pun. The writer will choose those Chinese symbols which best represent the syllables uttered in Taiwanese, without any regard whatsoever to their meaning in Mandarin, to which the characters belong. Whereas the individual symbols thus still appear to signify something in Mandarin, their combination results in a seemingly meaningless statement.

[4] *Taiwan yŭ-wen yen-jo sher tong-shun* 4 (20 April 1995) p. 11

Meaningless, that is, until they are read out aloud, and the listener realises that they stand for a meaningful sound sequence in the Taiwanese language.

It took me a long time to understand this, so for your benefit, here is a little example of how this process works, and it is one which you can grasp without knowing any Chinese characters at all. If you want to try the method experimentally, just ask a German speaker to listen to someone reading out the following English text:

> Nor din- Sue din- Austin- vest in
> Sue how say? is Sam Allah best in?

The meaningless English will come across as meaningful German:

> Norden, Süden, Osten, Westen-
> Zuhause ist's am allerbesten.

Or: "North, south, east, west- home is still the very best." For some such nonsensical renderings of English "Mother Goose rhymes" in German and French, see *Mörder Guss Reims* ,[5] where the ostensible editor provides a spate of delightful pseudo-philological footnotes exploring possible and wonderfully facetious meanings of his mock-German transphonetisations.

But while riddles can be fun, one would not necessarily like any text to be a riddle. Unusual ways of writing, however, merely take some getting used to before they become usual, and those who will complain about the 'illegibility' of non-standard texts are simply saying that they do not want to make the required effort. Even with Chinese characters, people may quite easily get into the habit of reading them in two different ways, and there are not a few in Taiwan who are producing entire texts in the manner described above, as well as embedding such

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[5] *Mörder Guss Reims. Selected Poems of Gustav Leberwurst. Transcribed and Annotated by John Hulme* (London, 1981)

transcriptions of Taiwanese into texts written in Standard Mandarin.What makes the situation complicated is that at this moment, there is very little standardisation and much experimentation. One technique that is bound to confuse Mandarin readers is the creation of new characters by alterations to existing ones. There is the Mandarin 井 (jing), for instance, meaning "well". By insertion of a line into the centre of the character, as the representation of an object falling into a well, writers of Minnan-hua make it represent the onomatopoeic word (tong) with the meaning "fall into water": 井

A further expansion of the possibilities for writing Minnan-hua is achieved by the introduction of alphabet letters into a sequence of characters, where <e>, for instance, represents the weak vowel sound [ə] which is the possessive and adjectival suffix in Minnan-hua, equivalent to the Mandarin [də], as in the following:[6]

《樹仔ｅ目屎》

（台語歌詩）

周東和（扶畅）

蓊蓊大樹幾若代
人樹相處無相害
樹腳ｅ泥搬戲臺
即款代誌恁甘知

廟寺神佛上偉大
折阮子孫換盆栽
囝在曝場鐵架臺
害伊枝骨伸攏來
鐵鍊鎖伊可憐代
爲何人心赫爾歹
目屎輾落吞腹內
伊ｅ苦痛恰人知

多想母土阮上愛
落土生根才應該
枝葉旺盛涼風來
保恁子孫萬世代

Here comes an English translation, and a translation from that into Scots. While the latter can naturally not be faithful to all the nuances of the original, as for instance the fact that the

[6] Pu-you (Tong-he Chou), in: *Taiwan yü-wen yen-jo sher tong-shun* 4 (20 April 1995) p. 5; English translation by Joseph Yang; Scots version by Manfred Malzahn

Taiwanese expression for "tears" is the neatly metaphorical "eye-shit", it would appear to do more justice to it:

The tears of the trees
Trees have lived for many generations
Harmoniously together with human beings
Under them people made music and enacted plays
Do you know about these matters?
The greatest are the gods in the temples
Removing my descendants and growing miniature trees
In the square enclosed by the iron bars
Unable to stretch their branches
It is a pity to be locked in shackles
How cruel are human beings?
Falling tears are swallowed up by bowels
Who can understand their sufferings?

I cherish my mother earth's affections
On the earth a tree grows
When it flourishes come the cool winds
And it will protect generations and generations

The greetin o the trees
Trees hae bidden sin auld lang syne
In greement wi fowk at their gate-end
Ablaw them tunes were played an plays ackit
Dae ye ken the crack anent yon leid?
The high-heid yins are the gods in the temples
Sinderin mah affcome an settin tottie trees
In the fower-neukit gleib inby airn baurs
Whaur they couldnae rax their brainches ava
Weel scunnert tae sit fast in the cock-stuil
Hoo fell can fowk be?
Painches swally teardraps that faa
Wha wad unnerstaun their dool?

Ah'm lippent tae the luv o mah mither grun
Frae yon grun a tree growes
Its flooers will halse the caller wins
An it will bield fowk tae their bairns' bairns

While it could be argued that one might simply try and make the English version more poetic, the very fact that it is written in Taiwanese instead of Mandarin seems to me to demand that it be translated into something other than Standard English. Scots in turn would demand a translation into something other than Mandarin. Where Scottish texts contain a mixture of linguistic codes, as for instance in Scott's or Stevenson's fiction, it would be mandatory for the translator to have a corresponding paradigm at hand, in order to safeguard the subtle distinctions between characters and narratorial voices. If everyone talks the

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same, an important artistic dimension is lost, along with a sense of place and a degree of verisimilitude.

In translations of literature from Taiwan into Standard English, as for example in the short story anthology *Death in a Cornfield* ,[7] the reader perceives no difference in linguistic codes, and is left to guess whether there is a distinction between different voices, or whether the texts were written in Mandarin without any attempt at representing other languages spoken in Taiwan. A collection of Scottish short stories translated into Mandarin would appear similarly lifeless, and devoid of at least one key feature of its Scottishness. It would be great to see one produced along the lines I have suggested here: if necessary, by way of an intermediate translation, as in the short example given in this paper.

Taiwan and Scotland could very well talk to each other, and learn from one another. Although Scottish literature seems on the whole to have rather more achievements to boast of than the literature of Taiwan, Taiwan seems ahead of Scotland in some other respects. It was, for instance, suggested that speeches during election campaigns be delivered in Taiwanese. And finally, the Hakka Association for Public Affairs has "asked that legislation be passed declaring Hakka, Mandarin, Minnanhua (Taiwanese) and the tongues of Taiwan's indigenous tribes all official languages, and translation provided at governmental assemblies."[8] Here indeed is a neat idea for the new Scottish Parliament.

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[7] Perng, Ching-hsi and Wang, Chiu-kuei (eds), *Death in A Cornfield and Other Stories From Contemporary Taiwan* (Hong Kong, 1994)
[8] Christopher Bodeen, "Hakka Reps Want Candidates to Endorse Aims for Support", *The China Post* (11 November 1995) p. 20